Deportation, Crisis, and Social Change

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Abstract and Keywords

In contemporary migration policy and practice across the globe, deportation has emerged as an apparently inevitable response to real, or otherwise perceived, migration crises. A skeptical attitude toward the analytic use of “crisis” in the context of deportation is called for, as is the need to concentrate on the political genealogy of the term, which culminates in the justification of “emergency” policies and the implementation of new measures of control. Yet, at the same time—when states govern undocumented or unwanted residents through deportation and employ the notion of crisis for justifying irregular and often violent acts towards deportable subjects—a situation emerges that indeed shares key characteristics with the definition of crisis. Not only deportees, but also their families and other community members perceive the threat, the execution, and the outcome of deportation as a radical disruption from the norm, a break of a situation considered normal, stable, and healthy. By means of distinguishing different levels of perceptions as well as rationales of linking deportation to the notion of crisis, the transformative element inherent in deportation is revealed, which complicates popular and political notions of membership, security, and mobility.

Keywords: deportation, forced removal, displacement, detention, crisis, transnational families

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